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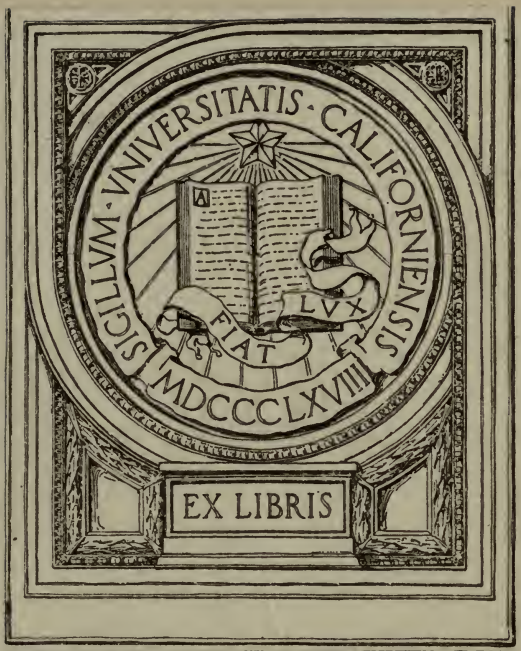
WOMENKIND

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON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Womenkind

Womenkind

By

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

Author of "Daily Bread," etc.

New York
The Macmillan Company
1912

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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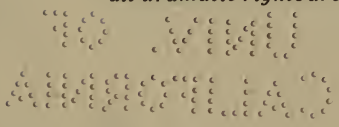


PERSONS

EZRA BARRASFORD, *an old blind shepherd.*

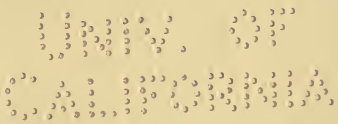
ELIZA BARRASFORD, *his wife.*

JIM BARRASFORD, *their youngest son.*

PHŒBE BARRASFORD, *Jim's bride.*

JUDITH ELLERSHAW.

SCENE. *The living-room at Krindlesyke, a lonely cottage on the fells.* Ezra, *blind, feeble-minded, and decrepit, sits in an armchair near the open door.* Eliza Barrasford *is busy near the hearth.*



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Womenkind

ELIZA [*glancing at the clock*]:
It 's nearly three.
They 'll not be long in being here.

EZRA:
What 's that?

ELIZA:
You 're growing duller, every day.
I say they 'll not be long now.

EZRA:
Who 'll not be long?

ELIZA:
Jim and his bride, of course.

EZRA:
His bride?

ELIZA:
Why, man alive, you never mean to tell me
That you 've forgotten Jim 's away to wed!
You 're not so dull as that.

EZRA:

We cannot all be needles.
I 'm dull, at times . . .
Since blindness overtook me.
While yet I had my eyesight,
No chap was cuter in the countryside.
My wits just failed me, once . . .
The day I married . . .
And Jim 's away to wed, is he?
I thought he 'd gone for turnips.
He might, at least, have told his dad . . .
Though, now I come to think of it,
I do remember hearing something . . .
It 's Judith Ellershaw that he 's to marry.

ELIZA:

No! No! You 're dull, indeed!
It 's Phœbe Martin Jim 's to marry.

EZRA:

Who 's Phœbe Martin?
I know naught of her.

ELIZA:

And I know little, either.
She 's only been here, once . . .
And now, she 'll be here, always.
I 'll find it strange, at first,
To have another woman in the house.

But, I must needs get used to it.
Your mother, doubtless, found it strange
To have me here, at first . . .
And it 's been long enough in coming.
Perhaps, that makes it harder.
But, since your mother died,
And she, poor soul, she did n't last too long
After you brought me home with you . . .
She did n't live to see a grandchild . . .
I wonder, now, if she . . .
And yet, I spared her all I could . . .
Aye! that was it, for certain!
Poor soul, she could not bear to see
Another woman do her work;
And so, she pined and wasted.
If only I had known!
Since she was carried out,
There 's scarce a woman crossed the
threshold.
No other woman 's slept the night
At Krindlesyke for forty years . . .
Just forty years with none but menfolk!
A queer life, when you think of it.
Well, well, they 've kept me busy, doing for
them.
And there 's few left now,
Only you and Jim . . .

And now, Jim's bride . . .
Another woman comes . . .
And I must share with her.
I dare say that we 'll manage well enough:
She seemed a decent lass,
When she was here, that once . . .
Though, there was something in her eyes
I could n't quite make out.
She hardly seemed Jim's sort, somehow.
I wondered at the time . . .
But, who can ever tell why women marry?
Still, Jim will have his hands full,
Unless she 's used to menfolk.
I never saw her like . . .
She 'll take her own way through the world,
Or I am sore mistaken:
Though, she seemed fond enough of Jim.
He 's handsome . . . yet . . .
It 's hard to say why such a girl as she . . .

EZRA:
Tut! tut! girls take their chance.
And Jim takes after me, they say.
If he were only half as handsome
As I was at his age . . .
You know yourself . . .
You did not need much coaxing.

ELIZA:
Well . . . doubtless, she knows best . . .
And you can never tell . . .

EZRA:
Where does she hail from?

ELIZA:
Somewhere Bentdale way.
Jim met her at the Fair, a year ago.

EZRA:
I met you at the Fair.

ELIZA:
Aye, fairs have much to answer for . . .
But, she was not my sort.
And yet, she 's taken Jim . . .

EZRA:
I thought 't was Judith Ellershaw.

ELIZA:
No! No! I 'm glad that it 's not Judith.
Jim fancied her, at one time;
But Jim 's had many fancies.
He never knew his mind.

EZRA:
Aye, Jim is gay, is gay!
And I was gay, when I was young.
And Jim . . .

ELIZA:

Aye: Jim 's his father's son.
'T was well that went no further:
For Judith flitted one fine night . . .
'T was whispered that her father 'd turned
her out.
He 's never spoken of her since,
Or so his neighbours say . . .
And no one 's heard a word of her.
I never liked the lass . . .
She 'd big cow-eyes . . .
There 's little good in that sort:
And Jim 's well quit of her.
He 'll never hear of her again.
That sort . . .

EZRA:

I liked the wench.

ELIZA:

Aye! you 're Jim's father.
It 's well he 's settling down, at last.
He 's wild, like all the others . . .
Sometimes I 've feared he 'd follow them . . .
Six sons, and only one at home,
And he the youngest of the bunch,
To do his parents credit!
The others all . . .

But, now Jim 's married, he may settle down.
If you 'd not married young,
God knows where you 'd have been to-day.

EZRA:

God knows where you 'd have been,
If we 'd not met, that Fair day!
I 'd spent the last Fair with another girl—
A giggling, red-haired wench—
And we were pledged to meet again.
And I was waiting for her, when I saw you.
But, she was late . . .
And you were young and bonnie . . .
Aye, you were young and pink . . .
There 's little pink about you now, I 'm doubting.

ELIZA:

Nay! forty years of Krindlesyke, and all . . .

EZRA:

If she 'd turned up in time, young Carroty,
You 'd never have clapped eyes on Krindlesyke:
This countryside and you would still be strangers.

ELIZA:

If she 'd turned up . . .

She 'd lived at Krindlesyke, instead of me.
This forty year . . . and I . . . I might . . .
But, what 's to be, will be:
And we must take our luck.

EZRA:
I 'm not so sure that she 'd have seen it either:
Though she was merry, she 'd big rabbit-
teeth
That might be ill to live with . . .
Though they 'd have mattered little, now
Since I am blind . . .
And she was always merry . . .
While you . . . but you were young . . .

ELIZA:
And foolish!

EZRA:
Not so foolish . . .
For I was handsome then.

ELIZA:
Aye: you were handsome, sure enough:
And I believed my eyes, in those days,
And other people's tongues.
There 's something in a young girl seems to
fight
Against her better sense,

And gives her up, in spite of her.
Yes, I was young!
And just as foolish then as you were handsome.

EZRA:

Well, fools, or not, we had our time of it:
And you could laugh in those days . . .
And did not giggle like the red-haired wench.
Your voice was like a bird's . . .
But, you laugh little, now . . .
And Lord! your voice . . .
Well, still it 's like a bird's, maybe,
For there be birds, and birds—
There 's curlew, and there 's corncrake.
But then, 't was soft and sweet.
Do you remember how, nigh all day long,
We sat together on the roundabout?
I must have spent a fortune . . .
Besides the sixpence that I dropped . . .
For we rode round and round,
And round and round again:
And music playing all the while.
We sat together in a golden carriage;
And you were young and bonnie:
And when, at night, 't was lighted up,
And all the gold, aglitter,

And we were rushing round and round,
The music and the dazzle . . .

ELIZA:
Aye! that was it, the music and the dazzle . . .
The music and the dazzle, and the rushing . . .
Maybe, 't was in a roundabout
That Jim won Phœbe Martin.

EZRA:
And you were young . . .

ELIZA:
And I was young.

EZRA:
Aye, you were young and bonnie:
And then, when you were dizzy . . .

ELIZA:
Yes, I was dizzy . . .

EZRA:
You snuggled up against me . . .
I held you in my arms . . .
And warm against me . . .
And round we went . . .
With music playing . . .
And gold, aglitter . . .
The music and the dazzle . . .

ELIZA:
And there 's been little dazzle, since, or music.

EZRA:
Aye: I was gay, when I was young,
Gay, till I brought you home.

ELIZA:
You brought me home?
You brought me from my home.
If I 'd but known before I crossed the
threshold,
If I 'd but known . . .
But what 's to be, will be.
And now, another bride is coming home,
Is coming home to Krindlesyke . . .
God help the lass, if she . . .
But they will soon be here.
Their train was due at Mallerford at three.
The walk should take them scarce an hour,
Though they be bride and bridegroom.

EZRA:
I wish that Jim had married Judith.
I liked the lass.

ELIZA:
You liked . . .
But, come, I 'll shift your chair outside,

Where you can feel the sunshine;
And listen to the curlew;
And be the first to welcome Jim and Phœbe.

EZRA:

Wife, are the curlews calling?

ELIZA:

Aye: they 've been calling all day long,
As they were calling on the day,
The day I came to Krindlesyke.

EZRA:

I 've never caught a note.
I 'm getting old,
And deaf, as well as blind.
I used to like to hear the curlew,
At mating-time, when I was young and gay.
And they were whistling all about me
That night, when I came home . . .
The music and the dazzle in my head,
And you and all . . .
And yet I heard them whistling . . .
But I was young and gay!
And you were plump and pink . . .
And I could see and hear . . .
And now!

ELIZA:

And now, it 's Jim and Phœbe—

The music and the dazzle in their heads—
And they 'll be here in no time.

EZRA:
I wish he 'd married Judith.

[Ezra *rises; and* Eliza *carries out his chair, and he hobbles after her. She soon returns; and begins to sweep up the hearth; and then puts some cakes into the oven, to keep hot. Presently, a step is heard on the threshold; and* Judith Ellershaw *stands in the doorway, a baby in her arms.* Eliza *does not see her, for a moment; then looks up, and recognizes her with a start.*]

ELIZA:
You, Judith Ellershaw!
I thought 't was Jim . . .

JUDITH:
You thought 't was Jim?

ELIZA:
Aye; Jim and . . . [*breaks off.*]
Where 've you sprung from, Judith?
It 's long since you 've shown face in these parts.
I thought we 'd seen the last of you.
I little dreamt . . .
And, least of all, to-day!

JUDITH:
To-day? And should I be more welcome
On any other day?

ELIZA:
Welcome? I hardly know.
Your sort is never overwelcome
To decent folk . . .

JUDITH:
I know that well.
That 's why I 've kept away so long.

ELIZA:
You 've kept away?
But you were little here, at any time.
I doubt if your foot soiled the doorstep
A dozen times, in all your life.
And then, to come to-day, of all days—
When Jim . . . [*breaks off suddenly.*]

JUDITH:
When Jim?

ELIZA:
But, don't stand there . . .
You 're looking pale and tired . . .
It 's heavy, walking with a baby.
Come in, and rest a moment, if you 're weary.

You cannot stay here long:
For I 'm expecting . . . company.
And you, I think, will not be over eager . . .

JUDITH:
I 'm tired enough, God knows!
We 'll not stay long, to shame you;
And you can send us packing,
Before your company arrives.

[*She comes in; and seats herself near the door.* Eliza *busies herself in laying the table for tea: and there is silence for a while.*]

JUDITH:
And so, Jim 's gone to fetch the company?

ELIZA:
Aye: Jim has gone . . .

[*She breaks off suddenly; and says no more for a while. Presently, she goes to the oven; and takes out a piece of cake, and butters it, and hands it to* Judith.]

ELIZA:
Perhaps, you 're hungry, and could take a bit.

JUDITH:
Aye; but I 'm famished . . . Cake!
We 're grand to-day, indeed!
It 's almost like a wedding.

ELIZA:

A wedding, woman!
Cannot folk have cake,
But you must talk of weddings?
And you of all . . .

JUDITH:

I meant no harm.
I thought, perhaps, that Jim . . .
But, doubtless, he was married long ago?

[*Her baby begins to whimper; and she tries to hush it in an absent manner.*]

Hush! hush! my lass.
You must not cry,
And shame the ears of decent folk.

ELIZA:

Why, that 's no way to soothe it!
Come, give the child to me:
I 'll show you how to handle babies.

JUDITH:

And you would nurse my child!

ELIZA [*taking it in her arms*]:

A babe 's a babe . . .
Aye, even though its mother . . .

[*She breaks off suddenly, and stands gazing before her, holding the baby against her bosom.*]

JUDITH:
Why don't you finish, woman?
You were saying . . .
"Aye, even though its mother . . . "

ELIZA [*slowly, gazing before her in a dazed manner*]:
Nay, lass; it 's ill work, calling names.
Poor babe, poor babe!
It 's strange . . . but, as you snuggled to my breast,
I thought, a moment, it was Jim
I held within my arms again.
I must be growing old and foolish
To have such fancies . . . still . . .

JUDITH:
You thought that it was Jim,
This bastard . . .

ELIZA:
Shame upon you, woman,
To call your own child such!
Poor innocent . . . and yet . . .
O Jim! O Jim!

JUDITH:
Why do you call on Jim?
He has n't come yet?

But I must go, before . . . [*rising*]
Give me the child.

ELIZA [*facing her, and withholding the babe*]:
Nay! not until I know the father's name.

JUDITH:
The father's name?
What right have you to ask?

ELIZA:
I hardly know . . . and yet . . .

JUDITH:
Give me the child.
You 'll never have the name from my lips.

ELIZA:
O Jim! O Jim [*giving back the child*].
Go, daughter, go, before . . .
Oh, why 'd you ever come,
To-day, of all days!

JUDITH:
To-day? Why not to-day
As well as any other?
Come, woman, I 'd know that before I go.
I 've half a mind to stay till Jim . . .

ELIZA:
Nay, daughter, nay!

You said that you would go;
You know, you said . . .

JUDITH [*sitting down again*]:
Perhaps, I 've changed my mind.
I liked the cake; and, maybe, if I stay,
There 'll be some more of it.
It is n't every day . . .

ELIZA:
Judith, you know!

JUDITH:
Nay; I know nothing—
Only what you tell me.

ELIZA:
Then I will tell you everything.
You 'll never have the heart to stay . . .
The heart to stay, and shame us,
When you know all.

JUDITH:
When I know all?

ELIZA:
Lass, when you talked of weddings,
You 'd hit upon the truth:
And Jim brings home his bride, to-day.

JUDITH:
And Jim brings home his bride . . .

ELIZA:
Aye, lass; you would not stay . . .

JUDITH:
And Jim brings home his bride . . .

ELIZA:
They 'll soon be here . . .
I looked for them, ere now.
But, you 've still time . . .

JUDITH:
The bride comes home:
And you and I must take the road,
My bonnie babe, my little lass,
Lest she should blush to see us.
We 're not a sight for decent folk,
My little lass, my bonnie babe,
And we must go . . .
The bride comes home to-day . . .
We 're no fit sight for fair young brides,
Nor yet for gallant bridegrooms.
If we should meet them on the road,
You must not cry to him . . .
I must not lift my eyes to his . . .

We 're naught to him, the gallant bride-
groom.
And she might hear your cry . . .
The bonnie bride . . .
Her eyes might meet my eyes . . .
Your cry might tell her heart too much:
My eyes might show her heart too much . . .
Some bush must hide our shame, till they
are by,
The bonnie bride and bridegroom,
If we should meet them on the road,
Their road, and ours . . . the road 's the
same,
Though we be travelling different ways.
The bride comes home, the bride comes
home, to-day . . .
And you and I must take the road.

ELIZA:
Aye, lass; there 's nothing else for it.

JUDITH:
There 's nothing else?

ELIZA:
Nay, lass! How could you stay now?
They 'll soon be here . . .
But, you 'll not meet them, if you go . . .

JUDITH:
Go . . . where?

ELIZA:
And how should I know where you 're bound for?
I thought you might be making home.

JUDITH:
Home . . . home . . . and where 's my home—
Aye! and my child's home, if it be not here?

ELIZA:
Here, daughter! You 'd not stay . . .

JUDITH:
Why not . . . have I no right? . . .

ELIZA:
If you 'll not go for my sake,
Go, for Jim's.
If you were ever fond of him,
You would not have him shamed.

JUDITH:
And, think you, woman, I 'd be here,
If I had not been fond . . .
And yet why should I spare him?
He 's spared me little.

ELIZA:
But, think of her, his bride,
And her home-coming!

JUDITH:
Aye . . . I 'll go.
God help her, that she never suffer,
As I have suffered for your son.
Jim! Jim!

ELIZA:
You lose but little, daughter.
I know, too well, how little,
For I 've lived forty years at Krindlesyke.

JUDITH:
Maybe, you never loved . . .
And you don't know the road . . .
The road I 've come,
The road that I must go . . .
You 've never tramped it . . .
God send it stretch not forty years!

ELIZA:
I 've come that forty years.
We 're out upon the same road, daughter,
The bride, and you, and I . . .
And she has still the stoniest bit to travel.
We 've known the worst . . .

And you 've your little lass.
Thank God, it 's not a son . . .
If I had only had one daughter . . .

JUDITH:
You 'll have a daughter, now.
But I must go, before she comes.
The bride comes home . . .
Jim brings a daughter home for you.

[*As she speaks, a step is heard; and* Ezra Barrasford *appears in the doorway. Turning to go,* Judith *meets him. She tries to pass him; but he clutches her arm; and she stands as if dazed, while his fingers grope over her.*]

EZRA:
So, Jim 's got back?
I never heard you come, lad.
But, I am growing deaf.
As deaf as a stone-wall.
I could n't hear the curlew, not a note;
I used to like to hear them . . .
And now, I 'll never hear them, any more.
But, I forget . . .
You 're welcome home . . .
Is this the bonnie bride?
You 're welcome home to Krindlesyke
[*feeling her face*].

Why, wife, it 's Judith, after all!
I knew 't was she that was to be Jim's bride.
You said 't was someone else . . .
I can't remember . . . some outlandish
name.
But, I was right, you see.
Though I be dull, at times,
And deafer than an adder,
I 'm not so dull as some folks think.
There 's others growing old, as well as I . . .
You 're welcome . . .

[*His hand, travelling down* Judith's *shoulder, touches the child.*]

Ah, a baby!
Jim's child! Jim's child!
Come, let me take it, daughter.
I 've never had a grandchild in my arms,
Though I 've had many sons.
They 've all been wild, but Jim:
And Jim 's the last one left.
Come, I 'll not let it fall:
I 've always had a way with babies,
With babies, and with women.

[*He snatches the child from* Judith, *before she realizes what he is after, and hobbles away with it to the settle beside the fire. Before she can move to follow him, footsteps are heard on the threshold.*]

ELIZA:

Ah, God, they 're at the door!

[*As she speaks,* Jim Barrasford, *and* Phœbe, *his bride, enter, talking and laughing.* Judith Ellershaw *shrinks into the shadow behind the door, while they come between her and the high-backed settle on which* Ezra *is sitting, with the child, out of sight.* Eliza *stands dazed, in the middle of the room.*]

JIM:

Well . . . so that 's over!
And we 're home, at last!
I hope the tea is ready.
I 'm almost famished, mother—
As hungry as a hawk.
I 've hardly had a bite, to-day:
And getting married 's hungry work,
As Phœbe knows . . .
But, you 've stopped laughing, now, lass . . .
And you look scared . . .
There 's nothing here to scare you.
Have you no word of welcome, mother,
That you stand like a stock, and gaping—
And gaping like a foundered ewe?
I 'll have you give my bride the greeting
That 's due to her, my bride . . .
Poor lass, she 's all atremble . . .
But, we 'll soon see who 's mistress!

ELIZA [*coming forward*]:
You 're welcome, daughter.
May you . . .

EZRA [*crooning, unseen, to the baby*]:
"Sing to your mammy!
Sing to your daddy!"

JIM:
What ails the old fool now?
You must not heed him, Phœbe.
He is simple; there 's no harm in him.

[*Going towards the settle*]

Come, dad, and stir your stumps . . .
Why, mother, what is this!
Whose brat . . .

EZRA:
Whose brat! Whose brat!
And who should know but he!
He 's gay . . . he 's gay!
He asks whose brat!
Maybe, you came too soon, my little lass:
But, he 's a funny daddy,
To ask whose brat! [*crooning*]
"Sing to your mammy . . ."

[Judith Ellershaw *steps forward to take the child from* Ezra.]

JIM:

You! Judith Ellershaw!
Why, lass . . .

[*He moves to meet her; but stops in confusion. No one speaks, as* Judith *takes the child, and wraps it in her shawl. She is moving towards the door, when* Phœbe *steps before her, and shuts it: then turns and faces* Judith.]

PHŒBE:

You shall not go.

JUDITH:

And who are you to stay me?

PHŒBE:

I . . . . I 'm Jim's bride.

JUDITH:

And what would Jim's bride have to say
to me?
Come, let me pass.

PHŒBE:

You shall not go.

JUDITH:

Nay, woman, let me by!
You do not know me for the thing I am.
If you but guessed, you 'd fling the door wide
open;

And draw your skirts about you,
Lest any rag of mine should smirch them.
I 'm not fit company for fair young brides.
I never should have come 'mid decent folk.
You little know . . .

PHŒBE:
I heard your name just now . . .
And I have heard that name before.

JUDITH:
You 've heard my name before!
I wonder . . . but you heard no good of it,
Who ever spoke . . .

PHŒBE:
I heard it from the lips
That uttered it just now.

JUDITH:
From Jim!
Well . . . Jim knows what I am.
I wonder that he lets you talk with me.
Come, woman, I must go.

PHŒBE:
Not till I know the name of your child's
father.

JUDITH:
Nay! you 've no right to ask it.

PHŒBE:
Maybe . . . and yet, you shall not cross that
step,
Until you tell . . .

JUDITH:
Come, woman, don't be foolish.

PHŒBE:
You say that I 've no right.
Pray God, you speak the truth.
Yet, there may be no woman in the world
Who has a better right.

JUDITH:
Why, lass: you 'd surely never heed
An old man's witless babble!
A poor, old crazy . . .

PHŒBE [*still facing* Judith]:
If I 've no right, you will not have the heart
To keep the name from me.
But set my mind at ease.

JUDITH:
I will not have the heart!
If it will set your mind at ease,
I 'll speak my shame . . .
I 'll speak my shame right out . . .
I 'll speak my shame right out, before you all.

JIM:
But, lass . . .

JUDITH:
I would not have a bride unhappy,
Upon her wedding-day.
The father of my child was William Burn . . .
A stranger to these parts . . .
Now . . . let me pass.

[*She tries to slip by, but* Phœbe *does not make way for her.*]

JIM:
Aye, Phœbe: let her go:
Don't be too hard on her:
She 's told you what you asked . . .
Though, why . . . unless . . .
Yet, I don't blame the lass.
She should know best.

PHŒBE [*to* Judith, *looking her straight in the eyes*]:
You lie!

JUDITH:
I lie?

PHŒBE:
To-day, I wedded your child's father.

ELIZA:
O God!

JIM:
Come, lass, I say . . .

JUDITH:
No! woman, no!
I spoke the truth.
Have I not shamed myself enough, already,
That you must call me liar?

[*To* Eliza]

Speak out, speak out, and tell . . .
At least, you know me well enough
To tell her I 'm no liar.
Speak out, if you 're not tongue-tied:
And tell her all you know . . .
How I 'm a byeword among honest women,
And yet, no liar . . . Speak!
You 'd tongue enough a while ago:
And have you none to answer your son's
wife;
And save your son from slander?

ELIZA [*hesitatingly*]:
I never knew the lass to lie.

[*While they have been talking,* Ezra *has risen from the settle, unnoticed, and has hobbled round to where* Phœbe *and* Judith *are standing. He suddenly touches* Phœbe's *arm.*]

EZRA:

Give me the babe again . . .
Nay! this is not the lass . . .
I want Jim's bride,
The mother of his daughter.
Come, Judith, lass, where are you?
I want to nurse my grandchild,
The little lass, Jim's little lass.

[*While he is speaking,* Judith *tries to slip past* Phœbe; *but* Ezra *clutches hold of her: and* Phœbe *sets her back against the door.* Eliza *goes up to* Ezra; *and takes him by the arm; and leads him, mutteringly, back to the settle.*]

ELIZA:

Come, Ezra, hold your foolish tongue.
You don't know what you 're saying . . .

JIM:

If he don't hold his tongue, I 'll . . .

JUDITH [*to* Phœbe]:

And will you weigh an old man's witlessness
Against my word?
O woman, pay no heed to idle tongues,
If you would keep your happiness!

PHŒBE [*looking her in the face*]:

But, even while the tongue is lying,
The eyes speak out the truth.

JUDITH:
The eyes!
Then, you will pay no heed to me;
But let a dothering old man
Destroy your life with idle chatter.
You know my worth!
Yet, if you care for Jim,
You 'll trust his word.
If Jim denies the child,
Then, you 'll believe . . .
You would not doubt your husband's word,
And on your wedding-day . . .
Small wonder you doubt mine:
You 've got good reason . . .
But, Jim 's not my sort: he 's an honest lad:
And he 'll speak true . . .
If Jim denies the child . . .

PHŒBE:
If Jim can look me in the eyes . . .

JUDITH:
Speak, Jim, and set her mind at ease.
Don't spare me, Jim; but tell her all:
For she 's your wife; and has a right to know
The child 's no child of yours.

[Jim *stands, hesitating.*]

Come, lad, speak out!

And don't stand gaping there.
You know, as well as I, the child . . .
Speak! speak!
Have you no tongue?

[*He still hesitates.*]

Don't think of me . . .
You 've naught to fear from me.
Tell all you know of me right out . . .
No word of yours can hurt me . . .
I 'm shameless, now . . .
You know, my father turned me out . . .

[Jim *still hesitates.*]

Speak lad! Your wife is waiting.
If you don't tell the truth, and quickly,
You 'll have a merry life of it, I 'll warrant!
I would not be in your shoes . . .
See, how she 's badgered me:
And all because . . .
Come, be a man! and speak!

JIM:
The brat 's no child of mine . . .
Phœbe, I swear . . .

[*He stops in confusion, and drops his eyes. After a pause,* Phœbe *turns from him; and lays one hand on the latch, and the other on* Judith's *arm.*]

PHŒBE [*to* Judith]:
Come, lass, it 's time that we were getting
home.

JUDITH [*starting back*]:
That we?

PHŒBE:
Unless you wish to stay?

JUDITH:
I stay? . . . You mean . . .
O God, what have I done!
That I had never crossed this door!

ELIZA [*to* Phœbe]:
You 're never going, woman!
You 're his wife . . .
You cannot leave him . . .

JIM:
Leave! Leave me! She 's mad!
I never heard . . . and on my wedding-day!
But, I 'm your husband:
And I bid you bide.

PHŒBE:
Oh Jim, if you had only told the truth . . .
I might . . .
God knows . . .
For I was fond . . .

JIM:

Aye! now, you 're talking sense.
It 's well to let a woman know who 's master.
And what 's the odds, lass, even if the
brat . . .

PHŒBE [*to* Judith]:

Come, Judith, are you ready?
It 's time that we were getting home.

JUDITH:

Home? I 've no home . . .
I 've long been homeless.

PHŒBE:

That much he told me of you:
He spoke the truth, so far.
Thank God, he could not rob me of my
home!
My mother will be glad to have me back:
And she will welcome you,
If only for your baby's sake.
She 's just a child, to children.
We 're poor; and labour hard for all we
have.
There 's but two rooms:
So we must lie together,
Unless you are too proud . . .

Nay, lass: I see you 'll come with me:
And we will live, and work, and tend the
child,
As sisters, we who care . . .
Come, Judith!

[*She flings the door wide; and goes out, without looking back.* Jim *steps forward to stay her, but halts in the doorway, and stands staring after her.*]

JIM:

Nay, lass! I bid you stay . . .
I bid . . . I bid . . .
The blasted wench! She 's gone!

[*He stands speechless; but at last, turns to* Judith, *who is still gazing after* Phœbe *with an unrealising stare.*]

Well . . . you will not forsake me, Judith?
Old friends are best . . .
And I . . . I always liked you.
And so, this is my baby!
Who 'd have thought . . .

[Judith *starts: clutches her baby to her breast, and slips past him.*]

JUDITH [*calling*]:

I 'm coming, Phœbe . . .
Coming home with you . . .

[Jim *stands in the doorway, staring after her dumbfounded, till they are both out of sight: when he turns; and slams the door to.*]

JIM:

I 've done with women;
They 're a faithless lot.

EZRA:

Aye: womenkind are all the same:
I 've ever found them faithless.
But, where 's your baby, Jim,
Your little lass?

JIM:

They 've taken even her from me.

[Eliza, *who has been filling the teapot, takes* Ezra *by the arm, and leads him to a seat at the table.*]

ELIZA:

Come, husband, take your tea, before it 's
cold:
And you, too, son.
Aye: we 're a faithless lot.

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